INTRODUCTION

This module provides general information about radiological survey instruments. Basic functions and limitations are discussed. Because there are many models of survey instruments available, this discussion provides only a general description of survey instrument types and uses. For participants wanting more detailed descriptions of specific devices and their functions, information on several commonly available instruments is included in the appendix to this module.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this module is to provide you with a general awareness and understanding of radiological survey instruments and how they can be used to survey for radiation exposure and contamination. Proper use of radiological survey instruments will provide you with more information on the hazards present at the scene.

MODULE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this module, you will be able to:

1. Identify two categories of radiological survey instruments.
2. State the proper application and limitation of contamination survey instruments.
3. State the proper application and limitation of radiation exposure survey instruments.
4. Identify commonly used dosimetry devices.

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RADIOLOGICAL SURVEYS AND INSTRUMENTATION

The use of radiological survey instrumentation by responders at an incident scene is optional. The Emergency Response Guidebook does not specifically recommend the use of radiological survey instruments during the initial response phase of the incident. Use of these instruments will give you more detailed information about the radiological hazards present at the scene.

Radiation cannot be detected by our senses. By using radiological survey instruments, properly trained responders can easily and accurately detect radiation. There are two general categories of radiological survey instruments available. One category of instruments is designed to measure radiation, while the other is designed to measure contamination. Some instruments are designed to measure both radiation and contamination.

Basic Theory

Similar to the way a radio converts radio waves to sound, a radiological survey instrument converts radiation energy to a meter reading. In a radiological survey instrument, ionizing radiation interacts with material in the detector to produce ions. The detector collects these ions and sends them to the instrument which produces an audible and/or visual response. Some radiological survey instruments will have the detector attached to the meter by a cable, while others may combine the detector and meter in one unit (*See examples below*).

There are many different models and types of radiological survey instruments, with a variety of features and controls.[1] Because they have different operating characteristics, you should know how to operate those used in your jurisdiction.

Contamination Survey Instruments

Contamination survey instruments are very sensitive and measure the presence of radioactive material in terms of counts per minute (CPM)[2]. Instruments that measure effects in CPM are useful for detecting contamination on personnel and equipment. A limitation of contamination survey instruments is that they should not be used to measure radiation exposure. Contamination surveys should always be reported in CPM.

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[1] Descriptions of some commonly available instruments, including the CD V-700 and the CD V-715 Survey Meters, can be found in the appendix.

[2] Some contamination survey instruments may measure in terms of disintegrations per minute (DPM). The same principles stated here for CPM apply for DPM.

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Application of Contamination Survey Instruments

The purpose of a contamination survey is to locate radioactive material in unwanted locations. Contamination surveys are useful for the following:

- Locating contamination on personnel and equipment
- Determining the effectiveness of decontamination
- Verifying contamination control boundaries
- Determining the extent and magnitude of a contaminated area

Because the difference between measurements of background radiation and that produced by contamination may be slight, it is important to determine the background (naturally-occurring) radiation level prior to performing a survey. Determine background radiation levels by observing the meter reading in the cold zone. Contamination surveys should be preformed in areas with low background radiation. The higher the background radiation level, the harder it is to determine contamination levels.

Begin by following your local procedures, or manufacturer's recommendations, for instrument pre-operational checks and instrument calibration frequency. Verify that the instrument is on, set to the lowest scale, the audio can be heard, and there is visual response. The probe/detector should be held within ½ inch of the surface being surveyed and moved slowly, approximately 1 to 2 inches per second. If the count rate increases while surveying, pause for 5-10 seconds over the area to provide adequate time for instrument response. Become familiar with your jurisdiction's or state's guidelines for when an individual or object is considered contaminated. For example, some jurisdictions use twice background or 100 CPM above background as a positive indication of contamination.

Radiation Exposure Survey Instruments

Exposure rate survey instruments usually measure radiation in terms of milliroentgen per hour (mR/hr) or roentgen per hour (R/hr). These effects are typically recorded in the biological equivalent of mrem/hour or rem/hour or, if the instrument uses the SI units, micro or milli sieverts/hour. Instruments that measure effects in mR/hr or R/hr are most useful for measuring radiation fields at the event scene. A limitation of radiation exposure survey instruments is that they are generally not as sensitive as contamination survey instruments and may not efficiently detect some types of contamination.

Application of Radiation Exposure Survey Instruments

The purpose of a radiation exposure survey is to locate and measure sources of radiation. Radiation exposure surveys are useful for the following:

- Establishing control zone boundaries
- Controlling personnel exposure
- Assessing package integrity
- Locating sources of radiation

Radiation surveys should be initiated with low-range survey instruments, which are better at detecting lower levels of radiation. Follow your local procedures, or manufacturer's recommendations, on instrument pre-operational checks and instrument calibration frequency. Prior to performing a radiation survey, verify that the instrument is on, the range selector switch is on the lowest scale, the audio can be heard (if applicable), and a visual response registers on the meter.

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Many radiation exposure rate survey instruments are designed to measure both beta and gamma radiation. These instruments typically employ some type of rotating or movable beta shield that can be opened to admit beta radiation. With the detector shield closed, beta radiation is blocked out and only gamma radiation is detected. With the beta shield open, both beta and gamma radiation are detected. The beta dose contribution from a measurement can be determined by subtracting the reading taken with the beta shield closed from the reading taken with the beta shield open (open window reading – closed window reading).

When surveying for beta and gamma radiation, radiation measurements should be made by approaching the area or object to be surveyed with the detector extended in front of you and the beta shield, if applicable, in the open position.

Periodically monitor in a 360º circle to ensure that you have not walked by a source of radiation. Monitor for radiation with the detector at waist level and periodically check above and below this level. When a source of radiation is discovered, survey as necessary to determine its approximate location.

When performing a radiation survey, it is useful to listen to the audio response so that even if you are temporarily distracted, the response to a radiation field can be heard.

The following table can be used to assist you in converting the SI units (sieverts) to the traditional units (millirem).

Reading in sieverts	Equals	Reading in mrem & rem
1 microsievert	=	0.1 millirem
1 millisievert	=	100 millirem
1 sievert	=	100 rem

DOSIMETRY DEVICES

Although not required at an incident scene, dosimetry devices are useful for keeping track of your total accumulated radiation dose. A dosimeter is like the odometer on your car. For example, where the odometer measures total miles traveled, the dosimeter measures the total amount of dose you have received. There are several different types of dosimeters available. Some commonly used examples are discussed here.

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Self Reading Dosimeters

A self reading dosimeter (SRD) measures the radiation dose in roentgens (R) or milliroentgens (mR). Generally, SRDs only measure gamma and X-ray radiation.

SRDs are called by many names: direct reading dosimeter (DRD), pocket ion chamber (PIC), and pencil dosimeters are a few common names.

To read the dosimeter, hold it up to a light source and look through the eyepiece. You should always record the SRD reading before you enter a radiation field (hot zone). Periodically (at 15 to 30 minute intervals) read your SRD while working in the hot zone, and upon exit from the hot zone. If a higher-than-expected reading is indicated, or if the SRD reading is off-scale, you should:

- Notify others in the hot zone
- Have them check their SRDs
- Exit the hot zone immediately
- Follow local reporting procedures

You should consider exiting the hot zone if the dosimeter reads greater than 75% of full scale. A dosimeter can be recharged or "zeroed" after each use. Record the final reading upon leaving the hot zone. Exercise care when using a SRD, they are sensitive instruments. Rough handling or dropping a dosimeter may result in erroneous or off-scale readings.

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Electronic Dosimeters

The electronic dosimeter serves the same basic function as the SRD, except that it has a digital readout that displays the total dose received by the wearer in milliroentgens (mR) or millirem (mrem). Electronic dosimeters are available from various manufacturers in a variety of sizes and shapes. There are many options available, depending on the required or desired response.

Many electronic dosimeters have an audible response that indicates the exposure rate through a series of chirping noises. The frequency of the chirping increases and decreases in relation to the dose rate. These "chirpers" provide the advantage of an audible warning when dose rates increase.

Thermoluminescent Dosimeters

Thermoluminescent dosimeters (TLDs) do not provide an "on-the-spot" indication of accumulated dose as the previously mentioned dosimeters do. Specialized equipment is needed to retrieve the radiological exposure data stored by the TLD. TLDs are not usually available for use by individual fire departments or local agencies. Specialized hazardous material response teams and state and federal radiological response organizations usually wear TLDs.

Check Your Understanding

1. Radiation itself **can/cannot** be detected by our senses (*circle the correct answer*).

2. Radiation **can/cannot** be measured easily and accurately (*circle the correct answer*).

3. Some radiological survey instruments are used to survey for _____, and others are used to detect and/or measure _____exposure.

4. If a radiological survey instrument measures effects in counts per minute (CPM), it is going to be most useful as a contamination survey instrument. True/False.

5. A limitation of contamination survey instruments is that they are not designed to measure _____ exposure.

6. Exposure rate survey instruments usually measure radiation in terms of _____ per hour or _____ per hour.

7. Some survey meters are designed to measure both contamination and radiation exposure. True/False.

8. The purpose of a contamination survey is to locate radioactive material in unwanted locations. True/False.

9. Instruments designed for surveying contamination usually record effects in _____ ____ _____.

10. A self reading dosimeter (SRD) keeps track of accumulated **(radiation/ contamination)** dose while in a field of radiation. (*circle the correct answer*).

M E R R T T




ANSWERS

1. cannot
2. can
3. contamination radiation
4. true
5. radiation
6. milliroentgen roentgen
7. true
8. true
9. counts per minute
10. radiation